

Testimony of
Vin Cipolla, President & CEO National Park Foundation
Before the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources
United States House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform
“The National Parks: Will they survive for future generations?”
April 22, 2005

Mr. Chairman and honorable members of the Subcommittee, my name is Vin Cipolla and I am the President and CEO of the National Park Foundation. The National Park Foundation was chartered by Congress in 1967 to encourage private philanthropic support of America's National Parks. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this subcommittee to comment on National Parks today and into the future.

The mission of the National Park Foundation is to strengthen the enduring connection between the American people and their National Parks by raising private funds, making strategic grants, creating innovative partnerships and increasing public awareness. The National Park Foundation operates above what we call the “bright line” of Congressionally appropriated funds, by contributing direct monetary support, goods and services to the National Park Service that add to, but do not replace Federal appropriations. Over the past eight years NPF has enjoyed substantial growth: over \$239 million in contributions and \$217 million in total grants and program support to National Parks across the country. The Foundation's growth has been achieved with fundraising and administrative costs kept to a minimum – Money Magazine recently recognized the NPF as one of eight charities best at maximizing the percentage of donations going directly to programs supported.

A Tradition of Private Philanthropy

As you are aware, National Parks have a long tradition of private philanthropy. National Park philanthropy began with an innovative approach to preservation – purchase vast tracts of land and donate them to the Federal government. One hundred years ago, simply converting land from private ownership to public ownership was all that was necessary to protect it for future generations. Today, whether it is funding new Junior Ranger programs that connect with today's youth, supporting volunteerism programs that empower citizens to care for the land, assisting with multi-lingual outreach efforts inviting new Americans to the National Parks, or backing Park programs that bring classroom lessons to life, the National Park Foundation is bringing new and different approaches to preserving and protecting National Parks. Just as the needs of Parks have changed over time, so has philanthropy in this country today. The opportunity before us is to bring these two traditions together.

Building on Tradition with Innovation

We have built on the conventions of public private partnerships by developing innovative approaches to improve visitor services, increase volunteer opportunities, offer more educational programs and engage the community with their Parks over the long term. The role of private philanthropic support is to fund inventive, cutting edge programs in these areas and to ensure evaluation of those programs to determine their effectiveness. There are many levels to this support, from the local friend's groups, supporting individual Parks, to national partners like the National Park Foundation giving system-wide support to Parks.

The Future of Private Philanthropy for National Parks

Private philanthropy has traditionally been held in the hands of a few individuals and corporations whose commitment is strong, consistent and valuable. We view the future success of private support not only in the capable hands of Congress and these traditional partners, but also in the hands of the 80 million plus National Parks visitors and enthusiasts. The future of philanthropic support is in both diversifying the opportunity to experience National Parks, and also in diversifying the opportunity to support our Parks. Along with our Board of Directors, I am committed to expanding the base of individuals that support our National Parks directly. We want to engage these millions of Park visitors and enthusiasts and take their love of these special places to the next level to ensure that their interests and financial support are manifested in direct support to National Parks. We will use many of the new communication technologies available to reach the American public and connect them with their Parks. I am new to the National Park Foundation, but not to the world of non-profits, entrepreneurship, and innovative technology. Ensuring the future of the National Parks through the generosity of Americans with use of this new technology will be one of my top priorities in starting here at the National Park Foundation.

Conclusion

The fabric of our nation is strengthened and enriched through the unique cultural, historical and scenic beauty of our National Parks. They inspire us and challenge us to understand more deeply American history, the American way of life and the natural processes that surround us. They can be utilized as powerful tools of education for our children and offer the very best of these United States to all who seek them out. Support for National Parks ensures the very best of returns, not those of monetary value, but those of preserving and protecting uniquely American principles.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your ongoing support of National Parks and the National Park Foundation, and thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I can answer any questions you may have.